Commitment and dyadic coping in long-term relationships

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Abstract: Background: Previous research focused on relationship commitment as the outcome of high satisfaction, poor alternatives, and high investments. We propose that commitment is a prerequisite in highly satisfied couples, fostering relationship maintenance behavior such as positive dyadic coping. Method: Structural equation models identified the relationship between commitment, relationship satisfaction, and dyadic coping with data from 201 heterosexual couples with an average relationship length of 34 years. Results: The common fate model confirmed that relationship satisfaction mediated the effects between commitment and dyadic coping on a latent dyadic level. Additional analyses revealed that women's satisfaction was mainly responsible for mediating effects between both partners' commitment and dyadic coping. Conclusions: Findings support the essentiality of commitment for couples' maintenance strategies and for consistency in long-term relationships.

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Commitment and Dyadic Coping in Long-Term Relationships

INTRODUCTION

Commitment is known to foster a wide range of relationship-building, and -maintaining behavior, and to be decisive for relationship continuity as it stands for the intimate partners' willingness to actively work on their relationship (Johnson, 1991; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Our main objective being the exploration of the connectedness between dyadic partnership variables in long-term relationships, we decided to investigate a direction of the association between commitment and pro-relationship behavior which Ogolsky (2009) called the "motivational model". Whereas relationship commitment is preponderantly considered a criterion variable (e.g. Canary & Stafford, 1992; Floyd & Wasner, 1994; Rusbult 1983), the motivational model postulates, that in long-term relationships, commitment can function as a predictor and lead to increased levels of pro-relationship behavior. We suggest that commitment predicts pro-relationship behavior in form of common dyadic coping and that this association is mediated by relationship satisfaction. As high commitment was found to trigger a wide range of relationship-favorable behaviors in individual (Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2001; Rusbult , Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991; VanLange et al., 1997 a+b), as well as in dyadic analyses (Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2008), we believe that relationship commitment can function as a starting point in a relationship and that many behavior patterns within an intimate partnership are influenced by it.

Relationship Commitment

In an intimate relationship, relational commitment arises from previous and existing experiences with partnership dependence (Rusbult, 1980), and functions as a trend-setter for further directions in the partners' interdependence-behavior (Tran & Simpson, 2009).

Interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) suggests that partners are dependent on one another reciprocally inasmuch as the partners fulfill their respective needs. It is this mutual need for "instrumental support, affection, sexual fulfillment, and emotional closeness" (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993, p. 179) which intensifies intimate partners' dependence and nurtures their relationship satisfaction. However, the authors make a distinction between levels of satisfaction and levels of dependence: the former stands for high levels of appreciation of the relationship conditions and for valuing partners' positive and need-fulfilling behavior. The latter reflects a relationship which is primarily based on the need-fulfillment. The authors expand the interdependence-theory by introducing commitment and formulating the *Investment Model of Commitment*. This model suggests that "dependence is subjectively represented by feelings of commitment" (Rusbult, Drigotas & Verette, 1994, p. 119). Thus, whenever couples reach the level beyond the individual need-fulfillment, they may feel a satisfaction that may emerge not only from their own rewards but also from their partner's rewards and need-fulfillment.

Commitment includes the long-term perspective to enter and sustain an intimate relationship (Frank & Brandstätter, 2002; Sternberg, 1986; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). Thus, due to an ongoing relationship-commitment which is kept up by the dependence on and the need for relationship satisfaction, intimate partners have a particularly high interest in applying a wide range of pro-relationship behaviors; Rusbult et al. (1994) define commitment as a "macromotive" (p.123) for partnership which triggers pro-relationship behavior. For instance, highly committed individuals are less inclined to retaliate against their intimate partners' provocative behavior and more prepared to forgive negative acts than less committed individuals (Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002). According to the authors, strongly committed individuals have a stronger sense of "we-ness" and consciously pursue the objective of a long-term relationship. They are therefore inclined to "develop patterns of reciprocal pro-relationship behavior" (p. 96).

Accordingly, the higher the commitment, the more stable and satisfactory the relationship, and the higher the partners' willingness to intensify their relational maintenance efforts for mutual adjustment (Rusbult, 1983; Schneewind & Wunderer, 2003). These interactions and interdependencies result in a reinforcing loop in which commitment can function as both predictor and criterion (see Figure 1).

[INSERT FIGURE 1]

Dyadic Coping: A Form of Pro-Relationship Behavior.

Relational maintenance stands for recurring dynamic affinity-enhancing activities that intimate partners undertake to keep their relationship on a satisfactory level (Bell, Daly, & Gonzalez, 1987) and is inherently connected to intimate relational constructs such as partnership-satisfaction, -stability, and commitment (Canary & Stafford, 1994). According to Bell et al. (1987), typical pro-relationship processes include – among other – altruism, listening, optimism, sensitivity, supportiveness and verbal affection. These constructs account for some of the major characteristics of dyadic coping (for more details on dyadic coping, see Bodenmann, 1995; 2005). Positive supportive dyadic coping for example is defined as a partner's supportive reactions to the other partner's stress signals, such as empathic understanding, showing solidarity, or encouraging, (Bodenmann, 2005). Supportive dyadic coping thus unites precisely those aspects of pro-relationship tendencies that define one partner's efforts to appease the other partner's stress by assisting her or him in their coping efforts through providing emotional and problem-focused support (Meuwly, Bodenmann, Germann, Bradbury, Ditzen, & Heinrichs, 2012). Negative dyadic coping on the other hand can be seen as corresponding to what Rusbult and Zembrodt (1983) qualify a neglect behavior (i.e., not valuing or appreciating the partner, criticizing the partner, or ignoring them in times of dissatisfaction). In our study, we use common dyadic coping, which is a sub-form

of positive dyadic coping (Bodenmann, Charvoz, Widmer, & Bradbury, 2004). It describes a common process which involves both partners reciprocally, including joint appraisals, feedback, and joint problem management (Lazarus, 1999).

Research has provided evidence for a positive connection between levels of commitment and pro-relationship behavior (Reis & Collins, 2000; Van Lange, Agnew, Harinck, & Steemers, 1997; Van Lange, Rusbult, Drigotas, Arriaga, & Witcher, 1997) on the one hand, and dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction on the other hand (Bodenmann & Cina, 2005; Bodenmann, Pihet, & Kayser, 2006; Bodenmann, Meuwly, & Kayser, 2011; Herzberg, 2013; Landis, Peter-Wight, Martin, & Bodenmann, 2013; Papp & Witt, 2010; Wunderer & Schneewind, 2008). In line with these findings we speculate that commitment brings forth the willingness to positively cope dyadically. In the present study, our focus lies on conjoint or common dyadic coping, where intimate partners manage a situation by joining their coping efforts. It is thus a conjoint effort made by both partners to be responsive to each other's stress reactions and to resolve upcoming problems as a couple.

The specification of this variable is essential as it takes into account the non-independence of couples' data and, hence, fulfills an important prerequisite for our methodological approach which models intimate partners' conjoint coping as a common fate factor (Ledermann, Bodenmann, Rudaz, & Bradbury, 2010; Ledermann & Kenny, 2011).

The current study

In this project, we intended to demonstrate that intimate couples who are highly committed to their relationship, and who show particularly high levels of relationship satisfaction, also show high levels of common dyadic coping (Hypothesis 1). This relatedness between the variables might seem self-evident, but though high and stable levels of commitment can be considered a prerequisite of a long-term relationship, commitment does not necessarily or directly lead to high levels of relationship satisfaction. In fact, high levels

of commitment to a partner who frequently requires individual and dyadic coping skills may cause a lower relationship satisfaction. In that case, commitment might still be positively related to positive coping (resulting in one partner reporting higher levels of supportive positive coping), and at the same time be negatively related to their relationship satisfaction. In our study however, we pay special attention to conjoint coping efforts, reported by both partners, expressing the couples' willingness to invest in their relationship.

Commitment, relationship satisfaction and dyadic coping are understood as between-dyad variables which reflect a common-fate construct and are relationship-referential (see Ledermann & Kenny, 2011), as both members of the dyad have to assess the variables and their assessment is not independent. Following the demand by Thompson-Hayes & Webb (2011) to treat commitment as a dyadic variable, we used the Common Fate Model (CFM; Ledermann & Macho, 2009) to calculate our hypothesized mediation model which stated that relationship satisfaction would mediate the association between relational commitment and common dyadic coping on a dyadic level (Hypothesis 2). The CFM is especially suited for this mediation analysis because it reflects the nature of between-dyads variables for which the dyad is the unit of analysis. In this case, we were interested in assessing a variable from both partners while taking into account that their scores are not perfectly congruent.

In addition, as dyadic coping and commitment can also be understood as personal variables assessing individual behavior, we were particularly interested in understanding the mediation process on the level of dyad members, and we used the actor-partner-interdependence-mediation model (APIMeM; Ledermann & Bodenmann, 2006), an extension of the APIM, for further analyses. The APIMeM consists of two exogeneous variables, and two endogeneous variables which are linked by the two mediator variables. Its purpose is to show that significant associations can exist between exogeneous variable and endogeneous ones, between exogenenous variables and potential mediators, and between the mediator and the endogeneous variable (Ledermann & Bodenmann, 2006). Because of prior evidence for

women's higher emotional involvement in their relationship (Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003), and because of women's higher probability to transfer personal dysphoria onto marital stress (Davila, Bradbury, Cohan, & Tochluk, 1997), as well as due to their increased vigilance to fluctuations in their relationship (Nolen-Hoeksema & Jackson, 2001), we expected women's relationship satisfaction to also influence men's variables in our setting. In other words; we hypothesized that women's relationship satisfaction would be a stronger mediator between both partners' commitment and dyadic coping than men's (hypothesis 3).

In order to analyze if age and relationship length moderate the mediating effects in the CMF model and the APIMeM, we additionally ran multigroup analyses with age cohort or relationship length (median split) as grouping variable. Since we do not have any specific hypothesis regarding differences with respect to age or relationship length we will test a completely restricted multigroup model first with all model parameters (except for means and intercepts) to be equal across groups. If this model fits to the data, there are no structural differences between the different groups. If this model does not fit to the data, restrictions will be cleared from the model in the following order: residuals and path coefficients.

METHODS

Participants

Data for this study were extracted from a larger study in which a total of 368 intimate couples were recruited by means of newspaper articles and advertisements. Participation criterion required couples to have been sharing an intimate relationship for at least one year at the time of survey. Couples were recruited in three different age-cohorts: 1) ranging from 20 to 35 years, 2) ranging from 40-55 years, and 3) ranging from 65-80 years. In the present

study, we had a special interest in examining couples with longer relationship durations. As age turned out to be highly correlated with relationship duration, we concentrated on cohorts 2 and 3 and on couples with a minimal relationship duration of 10 years. Our dataset initially contained a total of 246 dyads for cohorts 2 and 3. After exclusion due to missing data and relationship duration condition, our final sample included 201 dyads (92 in the younger age group and 109 in the older age group) whose average relationship duration was M = 33.74 years (SD = 14.17), ranging from 10 to 60 years, and representing a typical sample representing a typical sample of non-clinical relationships (Bodenmann et al., 2011; Sprenkle & Olson, 1978).The mean age for women was 57.97 (SD = 12.56), men's average age was 60.38 (SD = 12.30).

Measures

Cognitive and emotional commitment

As Rusbult and Buunk (1993) state, commitment includes "both cognitive and emotional components" (p. 180). Therefore the use of the ComSec (Bodenmann & Kessler, 2011, unpublished manuscript) with its subscales *emotional commitment* and *cognitive commitment* seemed highly appropriate to function as indicators of the latent construct *partnership commitment* (including both aspects, emotional and cognitive commitment). Couples rated two cognitive commitment items ("It is my goal to grow old together with my partner", and "It is my goal to make our partnership last forever") and two emotional commitment items (e.g., "It is my goal to be emotionally close to my partner", and "It is my goal to get fully involved emotionally with my partner") on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "does not apply at all" to 7 = "is absolutely true"). Cronbach's α was .80 for women's commitment and .80 for men's commitment for the total score.

Relationship Satisfaction

We used the German version (Sander & Böcker, 1993) of the Relationships Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988). Couples rated their relationship satisfaction on seven items in a 5-point Likert format, ranging from 1 = “not at all” to 5 = “completely”, example items being “How well does your partner meet your needs”, and “To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations”, negative items 4 and 7 being reverse-score recoded. Cronbach’s α was .89 for women’s and .90 for men’s scale.

Dyadic Coping

The Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI, Bodenmann, 2008) is a self-report questionnaire based upon the systemic-transactional stress concept by Bodenmann (1997). It comprises items related to a) the expression of stress signals by one partner and b) the other partner’s corresponding responsive reactions, namely as defined by supportive, negative and common dyadic coping, each of the forms being subdivided into problem- and emotion-focused support. It consists of 37 items that can be answered from 1 = “hardly ever” to 5 = “very often”. Both partners answer the questionnaire individually – male and female questionnaires are identical in items but gender-adapted. The questionnaire consists of the following scales: 1) own stress communication (emotional, problem-oriented, four items), 2) own supportive dyadic coping (emotional, problem-oriented, delegated, seven items), 3) own negative dyadic coping (hostile, ambivalent, withdrawal, four items), 4) own evaluation of conjoint dyadic coping (satisfaction with dyadic coping, efficiency of dyadic coping, five items), 5) partner’s stress communication (emotional, problem-oriented, four items,) , 6) partner’s supportive dyadic coping (emotional, problem-oriented, delegated, seven items), 7) partner’s negative dyadic coping (hostile, ambivalent, withdrawal, four items), and finally two items which evaluate the satisfaction with and the efficiency of the partner’s coping support. Sum scores can be calculated for all above-mentioned scales. Additionally, by summarizing the scores for

supportive dyadic coping, stress communication and negative dyadic coping (reversed polarity) the total score for dyadic coping for the 35 items ranges from 35 to 175 points.

For our study, we concentrated on three of the five items assessing the conjoint coping efforts, leaving out the two items with sexual connotations, and concentrating on those assessing mutual comforting and exchange of relevant information on the stress event (see Bodenmann et al., 2004). Sample items were "We try to handle the problem together and to come up with specific solutions" (item 31), "We engage in a serious discussion about the problem and think through what has to be done" (item 32), "We help each other to see the problem in a new light" (item 33). We opted for these items as we had also decided to not include the items on sexual commitment of the ComSec, leaving out the sexual components in our study. This decision was based on factor analysis that we conducted for both variables; the rotated component matrix clearly distinguished the sexual items from the other items. Cronbach's α was .87 for the three items of women's assessment of common dyadic coping, and .90 for men's.

Data Analyses

In addition to correlational analyses which we performed with Mplus 7.2 (Muthén & Muthén), to estimate the Common Fate Model (CFM, Figure 2; Ledermann & Kenny, 2011) as well as the Actor-Partner-Interdependence-Model of Mediation (APIMeM, Ledermann et al. 2011) as Structural Equation Models (SEM). The CFM analysis uses scores from both dyad members and integrates them into the reflective construct. In this model, latent dyadic variables are defined by both husbands' and wives' indicator scores on the same variable (in our model commitment, dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction). The CFM states that both members of the dyad are influenced by a shared latent construct that affects both, and is especially appropriate in the case of dyad members assessing a variable that expresses their common behavior. In this study, the items assessing common dyadic coping fully meet this

criterion, as they render the spouses' assessment of their joint efforts to cope with stress affecting them as a couple. Example items are "We seriously consider the problem and analyse what needs to be done", or "We help each other to reconsider the problem in a new light". The same prerequisite criterion is met by relationship satisfaction; the variable is per se non-independent of micro- and macrocontextual processes affecting both partners (see Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000, for an overview on determinants of marital satisfaction), and for relationship commitment. According to Ledermann & Macho (2009), three basic assumptions must be met in order to choose the common fate mediation model for data analysis: First, the dyad-members' data are influenced by a latent reflective variable. Second, there is evidence for mediation on the dyadic level, and third, husbands' and wives' scores are true indicators of the latent constructs. In our study these assumptions can be made: commitment and relationship satisfaction are variables that qualify the intimate relationship and are common dyadic variables which influence both partners, respectively. Furthermore, dyadic coping – specifically the items assessing common dyadic coping – is a prime example of a dyadic construct which affects both partners and which renders the dyad-members assessment of their dyadic behavior (see chapter on measurements).

While the common fate model integrates both partners' scores, displaying the associations between the latent dyadic constructs, the APIMeM takes into account the non-independent nature of dyadic data and uncovers interpersonal as well as intrapersonal associations between variables in distinguishable dyads.

RESULTS

Table 1 lists means and standard deviations of the study variables. Women and men differed significantly in their appraisal of common dyadic coping efforts as well as in relationship satisfaction, women scoring lower in both variables. Commitment level did not differ significantly between partners. Furthermore, Table 1 lists correlations between men

and women; we found medium to large correlations for the study variables, confirming our first hypothesis; commitment correlated significantly with relationship satisfaction and with dyadic coping, showing medium positive correlation coefficients for within-subject effects. Moreover, small to medium positive correlation coefficients were found for between-subject effects.

[INSERT TABLE 1]

Multigroup modeling

In order to investigate if the age or relationship length are possible moderators influencing the model parameters in the CFM and APIM, we first ran the CFM and APIM using the total sample and in a second step in a multigroup approach. The first model to be run was the model with completely restricted structural parameters (only means and intercepts may differ between groups). For the CFM we found that the two completely restricted multigroup models showed an excellent fit to the data (2 age cohorts: chi2 = 48.57; df = 45; p = .33; RMSEA = .03 [90%C.I.: 0 to .07]; CFI = .99; 2 relationship length groups: chi2 = 59.79; df = 45; p = .07; RMSEA = .06 [90%C.I.: 0 to .09]; CFI = .97). The two completely restricted multigroup APIMS also showed an excellent fit to the data (2 age cohorts: chi2 = 44.02; df = 42; p = .38; RMSEA = .02 [90%C.I.: 0 to .07]; CFI = .99; 2 relationship length groups: chi2 = 56.92; df = 42; p = .06; RMSEA = .06 [90%C.I.: 0 to .10]; CFI = .97). Consequently, we report the model parameters using the total sample (1-group solutions).

The common fate model

To test our second hypothesis of mediation on a dyadic level, we calculated the CFM. The model (see Figure 2) showed a good fit with Chi-square statistics of $\chi^2(3) = .591$, $p =$

.898, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 1.000 and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) <.001. Additionally, bootstrap analyses which were also used to test the indirect effect between the two latent variables revealed that the model showed an excellent fit to the data (Bollen-Stine bootstrap *p*-value of .908; if Bollen-Stine bootstrap $p < .05$, model is rejected, Bollen & Stine, 1992). Both effects from commitment to relationship satisfaction and from relationship satisfaction to common dyadic coping were significant. Moreover, the indirect effect proved to be significant, whereas the direct effect from commitment on common dyadic coping became non-significant. These results suggest that the association between intimate couples' relationship commitment and their common dyadic coping performance is fully mediated by their relationship satisfaction, which we stated in our hypothesis. Commitment explained 57% of relationship satisfaction's variance, and both commitment and relationship satisfaction accounted for a total of 70% of the variance in common dyadic coping.

[INSERT FIGURE 2]

The actor partner mediation model

For our third hypothesis, we calculated an APIMeM. In order to have the most parsimonious model, we used a stepwise modeling procedure. In a first step, we estimated the saturated model, that is: Direct paths of exogenous variables to mediators and to endogenous variables as well as the mediation paths were included to the model. Within this model, none of the direct paths between commitment (exogenous variable) and dyadic coping (endogenous variable) was found to be significant. This led us to estimate three additional models: i) a model without direct partner effects of commitment on dyadic coping, ii) a model without direct actor effects of commitment on dyadic coping, and iii) a model without

any (actor or partner) effect of commtiment on dyadic coping. The model without the direct partner effects (see Figure 3) showed the best fit, $\chi^2(2) = 2.002$, $p = .368$; CFI = 1.000; RMSEA = <.002. To be able to fully interpret the patterns of this model and to test the mediating effects, we performed the Sobel test (1982) to test the indirect effects between all variables (see Table 2).

[INSERT FIGURE 3]

Testing the indirect effects

Six of the eight indirect effects were significant (see Table 2); both men's and women's relationship satisfaction mediates the association between their own commitment and their own dyadic coping (actor effects of mediation). Women's relationship satisfaction proved to significantly mediate between all indirect exogenous-endogenous paths in the model, a finding which supports our third hypothesis. In other words, women's relationship satisfaction partially mediates between women's commitment and women's dyadic coping, furthermore it mediates between women's commitment and men's dyadic coping, between men's own commitment and women's dyadic coping, and even between men's commitment and men's dyadic coping, although this latter mediational effect was weaker than the mediation through men's relationship satisfaction. Men's relationship satisfaction partially mediates between their own commitment and their own dyadic coping, and between women's commitment and men's dyadic coping, but not between women's commitment and women's dyadic coping and not between their own commitment and women's dyadic coping.

[INSERT TABLE 2]

Discussion

The aim of our study was to explore the association between long-term relationships' commitment, relationship satisfaction and common dyadic coping in the realm of dyadic analyses, accounting for non-independence of distinguishable dyads' data. Our data of 201 intimate couples, with a relationship duration of at least 10 years, revealed that women reported a significantly lower level of common dyadic coping than men and that their relationship satisfaction was significantly lower than men's relationship satisfaction. Differences were significant but we must note that the levels – particularly the relationship satisfaction scores – were high on average, indicating an overall satisfied study sample. Men and women did not differ significantly in their levels of commitment.

Before examining the mediation process, we conducted correlational analyses with our study variables which revealed that higher levels of relationship commitment correlated significantly with both higher levels of relationship satisfaction and higher levels of common dyadic coping; not only did we find significant actor effects between these variables, we also found significant partner effects between all variables. These results were a promising hint as to our hypothesised associations between the variables (Hypothesis 1) as well as a confirmation of non-independence of dyadic data.

In a second step, we conducted an analysis, using the common fate mediation model, where we looked at how strongly the correlations between both partners' manifest indicators could be attributed to the common dyadic latent variable, i.e., the common fate, and whether relationship satisfaction would mediate the association between the two latent constructs of commitment and dyadic coping. This model confirmed that relationship satisfaction fully mediated the association between intimate partners' cognitive and emotional commitment and their common dyadic coping. We found evidence in line with previous research findings, confirming the association between high levels of commitment and high relationship satisfaction (Acker & Davis, 1992; Lemieux & Hale, 1999). Our results support findings of

relationship satisfaction's strong association with social support (Røsand, Slinning, Eberhard-Gran, Røysamb, & Tambs, 2012), and fostering the will to invest into the relationship (Wieselquist et al., 1999).

We then continued our analyses by using the APIMeM (Ledermann et al., 2011), which enabled us to thouroughly explore the role of relationship satisfaction as a hypothesised mediator between the exogenous variable of relationship commitment and the endogenous variable of assessed common dyadic coping on the level of the dyad members. Mediation analysis revealed classical actor-actor mediations; Women's relationship satisfaction partially mediated the association between their commitment and their common dyadic coping, and men's relationship satisfaction partially mediated the association between their commitment and their assessment of common dyadic coping. This latter association was mediated by women's relationship satisfaction too. Based on findings by Davila et al. (1997), we assume that women's relationship satisfaction plays such a significant role in the mediating process between men's commitment and dyadic coping, because of the prominent effect that women's affect has on relationship functioning. The authors found direct influence of women's dysphoria on their own as well as on their partners' social support behavior. In our study, direct, indirect and mediating effects of women's relationship satisfaction on dyadic coping behavior substantiate these findings.

Besides the significant insight the analysis of our data provided, we must allude to some limitations. An important caveat is that due to the cross-sectional character of our data, our analyses cannot confirm a definite causality of our variables. Based on our considerations which lead us to our model of the reinforcing role of commitment, we are convinced that commitment plays a major role in intimate relationships and – encouraged by our findings – especially in predicting intimate couples' pro-relationship behavior, but we must acknowledge that a group comparison with a clinical sample would contribute substantially to the relevance of our results. Because commitment has proven to also function as an endogeneous variable,

we would like to emphasize that in the present study, we fully concentrated on one specific aspect of the potential processes between relationship variables of commitment, relationship satisfaction and dyadic coping. The direction of the hypothesized paths in our models are fully in line with the "cyclical growth" between dependence, commitment, and investments in long-term intimate relationships (Rusbult et al., 2001, p. 376).

Furthermore, we opted for very specific items of dyadic coping, rendering the true common aspect of items that are being assessed by both dyad members. We did this to take adequate account of the dyadic analysis level of the common fate model. However, to expand and consolidate our findings, further analyses should examine to which extent they apply to the items of supportive dyadic coping and even on negative dyadic coping on the level of dyad members or to extend the present research to the items of common dyadic coping concerning sexual/intimate behavior. It could then be of high interest to include the sexual commitment items of the Comsec, which we ommited in our study. Finally, it would be sensible to supplement our analyses with observer-reports of specific affects in intimate couples' interactions (e.g. Johnson, 2002; Yoshimoto, Shapiro, O'Brien & Gottman, 2005) in order to counter the risk of social desirability that the self-reports used in this study might be subject to.

Besides these limitations, we believe that we have gained interesting insight into the complex mechanisms that connect variables of intimate relationship. The modelled structure between commitment and dyadic coping proposed in this study shows strong parallels to a dimension of commitment which Schoebi, Karney & Bradbury (2012) defined, "as an inclination to engage in maintenance behaviors", and which was found to bear stabilizing influence on couples' relationship. Understanding the facets of commitment and their influence on couples' willingness to jointly cope with problems in order to maintain their relationships has also practical implications; In a clinical setting of couple counselling, therapists might use this knowledge to help clients identify and redefine their concepts of

commitment , focusing on continuance and a common future as a couple (see Pope, 2013 for more details).

Finally, much of previous research has concentrated on individual analysis of commitment (Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986; Slotter et al., 2012), relationship satisfaction and also on partners' individually assessed pro-relationship efforts (Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Rabby, 2007) so far. Therefore, this study contributes an important aspect as it takes into account dyadic analysis, treating intimate couples as one entity, and looking in depth at non-independent processes on the level of dyad members.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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